Senator Stuart Syvret
Minister, Health & Social Services
E-mail: st.syvret@gov.je

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AN OPEN LETTER TO MR RICHARD BROCKEN
BY SENATOR STUART SYVRET

Dear Ritchie

Thanks for the letters you had published in the JEP on the 23rd December and the 18th January. I was beginning to get a little bored since my good friend Mr Boothman retired from writing his column. Anyway, I was reminded that I should reply when I heard Don Filleul on the BBC Radio Jersey phone-in programme this Sunday. Mr Filleul suggested I was a communist, which is similar to your assessment of me. Well, when people of Don's calibre – the mastermind behind the steam clock – speak, it pays to listen. It's always stimulating and beneficial to receive constructive criticism, and in reflecting on what you wrote I am beginning to think you are, in many ways, correct. However, before going on to confess the error of my ways, I should state that, contrary to your assertions, I have never been anything other than totally honest in my election manifestos. A rather quaint anachronism, I know, but these habits are hard to break. The issues and policies I work to address were openly declared in my manifesto at election time. There was nothing 'closeted' or 'cloaked' about them. Unlike – it has to be said – the sub-text to your letters which you rather unsportingly left veiled.

You failed to mention in your attacks on me that the Health & Social Services department, whilst under my leadership, has refused to enter into a multi-million pound public-private partnership with you to enable the construction of a private hospital on the site of your Stafford Hotel. I know, I know – it must seem so unfair when we readily engage in public-private partnerships with other businesses, such as the partnership with Dandara that enabled us to deliver the new dental clinic, and the partnership with the owners of the Sandringham Hotel site which will also be very beneficial; working with independent care homes; forming partnerships with the local GP community and so on. But I'm sorry Ritchie, the consistent and professional advice given to me and the old Health & Social Services Committee was that the particular deal with you involving your Stafford Hotel site just didn't stack up from a public interest perspective. Ritchie, as your own advisers told you, your scheme was only viable if the public "shared the risk". Your scheme was economic only if it could piggy-back on the many decades of heavy investment by the taxpayers of Jersey in their hospital and its infrastructure. Had the project gone ahead, one of the main results would be your venture creaming off the private health work, thus depriving the General Hospital of an important source of income. This income loss would have to be made up by the tax payer, who would also be continuing to maintain the General's emergency services which your unit would turn to at times of complications and crisis. Not a good deal, I'm afraid, Ritchie – it just didn't make any sense.

I also think that those currently investing in genuine stand-alone private facilities would be less than happy at the prospect of your venture gaining an unfair market advantage through a partnership with the General Hospital.

So Ritchie, whilst we are never going to agree on your private hospital proposal, there are so many other ways in which I now see that people like Don Filleul and you have been right all along.

You are certainly correct when you say that Norman Le Brocq was a communist. I had many conversations with Norman and whilst I didn't agree with his political philosophy, I regarded him – as did many people including the late Sir Martin Le Quesne – as a man of integrity and principle who worked tirelessly for the ordinary people of Jersey. Ritchie, people like Sir Martin and I may have thought Norman was a decent, if philosophically misguided, man, but I recognise now that we were mistaken. The 'truth', of course, is revealed in the Jersey Evening Post reportage of those post-war decades. When looking at archive JEP material (always an accurate historical source, don't you find?) it becomes clear that Norman was, in fact, Joseph Stalin incognito with a battalion of T34 tanks hidden in Grands Vaux woods. When his moment arrived he would surely seize the tea factory and re-name it Red October.

You know, Ritchie, thinking about Norman reminds me of the eulogies heaped upon him by the JEP and assorted oligarchs when he died. It seemed not to matter one jot that the JEP – the house-journal of the island's establishment – had spent decades in a spittle-flecked swivel-eyed mania of paranoia and hatred whilst trying to destroy him lest his policies compromise the money-minting opportunities of the odd landlord, lawyer or estate agent. If anyone notices when I kick the bucket, I do hope the JEP isn't so completely shameless as to print any encomiums of that kind about me. Such stinking hypocrisy is always a deeply unedifying spectacle, don't you find, Ritchie?

So, I now suspect you and Don are right. My politics might indeed have been 'extremist'. But you and I can hardly be objective judges of that question, can we? All we can do is explore the issues and let others compare and contrast.

I now see that the mistake I was making all along was to consider where my policies might fall on the political spectrum of, say, the UK or other European countries, and reaching the conclusion that my views were entirely mundane by the standards of western democratic discourse. By way of contrast, the "mainstream" policies of the Jersey oligarchy often struck me as being off-the-radar-screen in terms of stupidity, rapacity and unsustainability. You know the kind of stuff – placing a regressive sales tax on basic food, education and health care costs whilst minimising the tax bills of the rich, chucking 500,000 tonnes of toxic incinerator ash into sea-porous land reclamation sites, blowing a total of nearly £50 million of taxpayers money in capital overspends, setting a minimum wage that doesn't even reach 45% of the median wage, refusing to have a windfall tax on the spectacular profits of property speculators, allowing thousands of small business proprietors to dodge their social security obligations through the mechanism of paying themselves the bare minimum whilst their companies accumulate the profit thus leaving the taxpayer to pick up the shortfall, abusing migrant workers by charging them £120.00 per week to rent damp and stenching hovels, letting the gold-rush decades pass whilst accumulating a 'strategic reserve' that wouldn't even meet 12 months of public sector costs, – etc etc. I could go on and on, but I'm sure you get the picture.

I admit my error; I used to see such things as the manifestation of disjointed chaos, institutional inadequacy and the foetid miasma of an environment completely in thrall to short-term business interests. I now recognise what everyone else has always known. These achievements are the marvellous consequence of a brilliant political epoch.

I can now see that suggestions like capping the tax bill of billionaires at a maximum liability of £100,000 are a jolly good idea. I mean, why charge them more when we can tax medicines, bread, children's clothes and school fees instead?

You were quite right; my comments about politicians buying their way into office were scurrilous. I deserve to be thrown out of the States for another 6 months. I guess I was just allowing the resentment get to me; of fighting elections against people who might have spent £30,000 of their "sponsors" money on their campaigns. I had worried that big businesses and the rich – who have multi-million pound interests riding on the outcome of Jersey elections – would readily "sponsor" the "right" candidates. But, on reflection, I'm sure that doesn't happen – does it, Ritchie?

Yes, Jersey has got it right in not legislating for election expenditure. OK, OK, I grant you that all of the rest of the established democratic world embraced such laws decades ago, believing that democracy should take place on a level playing field. But I agree, it is the rest of the world which is extremist and Jersey stands alone as a beacon of moderation, rectitude and probity. Let's face it, Guernsey has laws controlling election expenditure – so it must be a mistake.

I'm sure all these other jurisdictions have got it wrong and that extravagant campaigns just don't affect the outcome of elections. I am sure that, as they went into the voting booth, the voters of St. Helier number 2 district simply thought "Right, if we elect that nice Mr MacLean, of the 'Seven Angry Men Party' he will oppose all that bleeding-heart-liberal nonsense about GST exemptions. Medicines, medical services and children's clothing must not be exempt from the tax! What we need is a representative who understands that you must tax the poor to help the poor." He has certainly met these expectations, so don't let anyone say that you can't rely on politicians. Well – OK, I didn't actually read his manifesto, but I'm sure he must have overtly promised to stamp on all this pinko nonsense so we can continue to benefit from the occasional crumb that might 'trickle down' from the tables of the rich.

Ritchie, thanks to you and Don I've been reflecting on my political views and maybe I was an extremist. I mean, what can I have been thinking of, moaning about the fact that a rich person can make a £50 million capital gain – that's £50 million – and pay not one penny – that's not one penny – of tax on that sum, whilst the States of Jersey puts tax on bread, insulin and bandages. I mean, just fancy; imagining that it's OK to take 1% in tax off of someone who has just made £50 million. Well – it is just communism, isn't it? Tax multi-millionaires instead of taxing bread and apples? Next thing you know I'll be suggesting that millionaires with £2 million yachts in the taxpayer funded marina should pay some duty on their marine diesel or that commercial property speculations should be taxed a little instead of children's clothing, basic food or education.

What can I have been thinking? To suggest taxing the mega-rich a little – when we can perfectly well put a tax on the incontinence pads of the infirm instead? Well – I ask you! – It's just political correctness gone mad, ain't it?

Thank heavens your letters and Don's comments have brought me to my senses and made me see such policies as the extremist crypto-commie nonsense they were. I shall now embrace the Laffer curve (appropriately weighted for local maxima, naturally) – let the rich pay no tax – no, forget that; let's pay the rich to be here. As Leona Helmsley said "only little people pay taxes." Well, OK – she was jailed shortly afterwards, but that was because governments just

don’t understand the exigencies of the wealth creators, do they? If your letters hadn’t brought me to my senses I would still be getting cross about taxes aimed at the poor, the inability of the States to pay for the latest cancer drugs, bread-line families, failure to pay our nurses sufficiently and people paying £120 per week to rent one–room wretched hovels.

Perhaps now that I have publicly recanted my misguided political views, maybe I’ll be offered a non-executive directorship of a bank or accountancy firm and then sit in political judgment on the institutions – err – ‘regulatory issues’. I mean, this was, after all, standard political practice for decades. And, let’s face it, if it was good enough for the colossus-like ‘Elder Statesmen’ of the ‘Good Old Days’, then it’s certainly good enough for me.

As your first letter said, I’ve “finally got the message”. I’ll have to admit that completely misjudging what the public want is a pretty big failure for a politician. I‘ve done it so many times I scarcely know where to begin my disencumbrance. How about the Waterfront? Clearly, the ‘silent majority’ of people in St. Helier actually wanted their ancient beach to be covered by a giant toxic waste dump and covered with structures copied from Birmingham circa 1974. Perhaps that historic view to Elizabeth Castle was just a nuisance; an obstacle in the way of more car parking? Yes, I confess I just didn’t “get it” that when they spoke of creating a “unique” waterfront, what they meant was we would – uniquely – have the only multiplex cinema on earth with prime-site sea views. Now I just shake my head and think ‘how could I have been so foolish?’

But just think, Ritchie, if I do step down in a couple of years, an additional seat will be available. Why don’t you run for it yourself? I think you would get in easily. Just put on some ‘salt-of-the-earth, working-man’ shtick – like one or two of your political friends – and there you go. Hell, let’s face it; if the voters of a district like St. Helier number 2 can be persuaded that just who they need to understand and represent them is a multi-millionaire property merchant with a country estate in England then anything is possible.

And just think of the opportunities: if you became ‘Senator Brocken’, you could pursue your interest in opposing “extremist political doctrines” and seek to establish a “House Un-Jersey Activities Committee”. There would surely be no shortage of support in the States with many members willing to serve on it. Just imagine the questioning you could lead: “Did you ever know or did you ever speak to Norman Le Brocq?” “Do you or did you ever believe that there should be a tax on the capital gains of multi-millionaires instead of a tax on dressings for the ulcerated legs of pensioners?” “Have you ever thought, or associated with those who thought, that it might be reasonable to expect the wealthy to pay a little more tax before we tax the food in the mouths of the poor?” “Do you, or have you ever, read the Guardian?” Anyone answering yes to any of these questions could be safely marked down as a dangerously subversive threat to society and hounded out of employment and home – as has actually happened in the past. And, let’s face it, this wouldn’t be too hard to achieve as you would have the enthusiastic support of the JEP, the island’s only “newspaper”. After all, this would be small beer to a publication which has exhibited such fulminating, crazed and vicious paranoia as to reveal, in an editorial comment, the mental health history of an individual whose political activism happened to displease the bosses. Though the timing of this incident was some years ago, the ‘standard’, if that’s the right word, remains the same. I used to think it was axiomatic that only weak and silly little men ever get to become editors of the JEP; tremulous poltroons who could be relied upon to service the interests of Jersey’s landlords, bosses and used car salesmen. I was wrong about this too. I now recognise that successive

editors have all been journalistic titans – fearlessly striding forth, girded for battle on behalf of truth and justice whilst guided by the finest traditions of the Fourth Estate.

So Ritchie (and this is secret, OK? Just between you and me) I used to constantly worry about the future of Jersey. Griped by an existential crisis, I would think 'what will we do in Jersey if things get difficult? We've seriously over-developed our environment, spread pollution, squandered our collective inheritance, dissolved our quality of life, exploited large cohorts of the population, accumulated terrifying pension scheme debts – and have saved not so much as one year's public expenditure to show for all of this.' I used to lay awake at night thinking 'things might get very hard for us in the next five to ten years'; that the tower blocks, the traffic jams and the concrete might simply be simulacrums of success; that we had absolutely no plan of any description to deal with issues such as peak oil and the resultant global economic and societal crisis. I used to fear that the architects of this destiny would – when the end of our hallucinated economy arrives – jet off to luxurious climes to their first, second, or fifth "holiday" home, having 'cashed their chips' and safely sent on their millions in advance – leaving a bitter, wrecked and betrayed community behind.

But I have put such fears behind me now and am going to send in my membership application to the Institute of Directors. I recognise that we have been led by geniuses and that there is simply no possibility of any of these bad things happening – and even if they did, every scion of the rentiers, every tax exile, every local millionaire and every thrusting entrepreneur will remain here – standing shoulder to shoulder with the rest of us; using their fortunes to succour the poor and ease the suffering; ready to save the day with that colossal business skill, initiative and resourcefulness that we have always been so proud of in Jersey. OK, I grant you that slave-trading is illegal these days, so it won't be so easy this time around – but I'm sure we will think of something.

Regards

Stuart

PS: If I disregard the professional advice and go for the private hospital deal on your Stafford Hotel site, will you pay towards my election campaign if I ever run again?

Cheers.